

# Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society

Newsletter – Summer 1990

## USA Symposium

The Society's Branch in America will be running a continuation of the commemorative symposium 'Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, A.D. 1165 – 1240, His Life and Times'. It will be held on Saturday and Sunday, 10th and 11th November, 1990 in the Lipman Room, Barrows Hall, University of California, Berkeley, USA. Speakers will include Dr William Chittick ('Meetings with Imaginal Men'); Dr Peter Lamborn Wilson ('Sacred Drift: On the Road with Ibn 'Arabi'); V.R. Holbrook ('Ibn 'Arabi and Ottoman Turkish Traditions: The Melâmi Supra-order'); Leslie Abadi ('Thou hast continued and wilt continue when and without times'); Peter Young and Jane Clark. As this event is a continuation of the Oxford symposium, Prof. Elton Hall, who gave a paper in Oxford, will present a report on the UK symposium, linking the two events. The Society would welcome the submission of further short papers, and titles and outlines should be sent to the symposium organisers by September 1990. All enquiries about the symposium should be sent to the Secretary, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, P.O. Box 1899, San Francisco, Ca. 94101-1899, USA. Tel: (415) 653-2201.

## Spanish Conference

The Regional Authorities in Murcia, the birthplace of Ibn 'Arabi, are organising an event to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the death of the Shaykh. This will take place over the 14th, 15th and 16th November, 1990. It will include an academic conference, and a programme of popular lectures. Enquiries should be addressed to: Consejeria de Cultura, Educacion y Turismo, Region de Murcia, Gran Via, 42. Esc. 3ª-4ª Murcia, Spain.

## Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 24th November, 1990 in the Lecture Theatre of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, at 10.00 am. Further details will be sent to members and fellows later this year.

## Symposium 1991

The eighth Annual symposium of the Society, which is to be entitled 'Ibn 'Arabi and Light', will be held at Wadham College, Oxford, from Friday April 5th to Sunday April 7th, 1991. Further details will be available later this year.

## Exhibition of Manuscripts

An exhibition of manuscripts of works by Ibn 'Arabi from the collection of the Vatican Library is to be mounted at the Vatican, hopefully during November 1990. A scholar from the Pontifical Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies will assist in the preparation of a handlist of the manuscripts

## PUBLICATIONS

### Fusûs al-Hikam

Volume Four of Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on *Fusûs al-Hikam* by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, rendered into English by Bulent Rauf, is expected to be available in the Autumn.

### Commemorative volume

The Society is investigating the possibility of a joint publication with a major publishing firm. It is anticipated that the book will be published in 1991.

*The Sufi Path of Knowledge - Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* - William C. Chittick.  
Published by the State University of New York Press, 1989.

It is not often that one is afforded the opportunity to read and review a work which is a truly major contribution, not only in its own specialised field, but also in many wider contexts of human experience and thought. Professor Chittick's new book is undoubtedly such a work, if only for the reason that it presents the non-Arabist for the first time with far more of the monumental *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah* of Ibn Al-'Arabi than has ever been available before. In fact the book is precisely the first major study in a European language of that mighty text of the Shaykh al-Akbar. Some idea of the veritable feast of material presented here by the author may be had from the fact that its nearly five hundred pages have each got two columns of text. Of course, even in such a large and comprehensive study as this, only a relatively small portion of the encyclopaedic *Futūhāt* is made available, serving only to indicate the enormous scope of the original work and the huge task which still awaits future scholars of Ibn al-'Arabi.

That Professor Chittick has, nevertheless, succeeded in providing a study of wide and profound scope is quickly revealed by the table of contents of the work. In a relatively short introduction the author briefly introduces the reader to the life and work of Ibn al-'Arabi, the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, aspects of Qur'an interpretation, a survey of Western studies on the Shaykh al-Akbar and a note on the work itself. Thereafter he divides the work into seven main chapters, each of which is subdivided into sections, there being twenty sub-sections in all. The seven main chapters are entitled, Overview, Theology, Ontology, Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Soteriology and Consummation. An example of the way one of these chapters is subdivided is that the chapter on Theology has three main sections entitled, The Names of God, the Divine Roots of Hierarchy and Conflict and the Essence and the Divinity. Each of these chapter sections is further divided into subsections. For example the section on the Names of God has subsections on Names, Attributes and Relationships, The Names of the Names, Relationships, The Two Denotations of the Names, Realities, Roots and Supports, Properties and Effects, The Names of Engendered Existence and Secondary Causes. Thus, all of this carefully arranged and presented material constitutes, as the sub-title of the book suggests, a wide-ranging study of Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination.

In presenting us with this magnificent feast of Ibn al-'Arabi's teachings and inspirations, the author has chosen to omit from his study both detailed comparisons with other mystics and philosophers and also any major analytical exposition of his own other than to ease and assist the presentation of the texts of the *Futūhāt* with often very helpful basic commentary and explanation. Thus, as far as is possible in such a work, the writings of Ibn al-'Arabi are allowed to speak for themselves without the author's interpretations and explanations in any way intruding into the main flow of the presented texts from the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah*. Indeed, the author is to be congratulated for the skill with which he has managed to combine pertinent and significant comment and explanation without 'interrupting' the Master.

Apart from small points of disagreement inevitable in reviewing such a work, I have two main general criticisms to make. Firstly, I found several of the passages from the *Futūhāt* unduly long for the presentation of the point under consideration and, while not wishing to suggest that we should have had less of the great Shaykh's writings, some judicious trimming here and there might have been in order. Finally, it has to be said that the translation of the *Futūhāt* material is sometimes rather stilted and over-literal in its effect, resulting often in a certain lack of facility and felicity of expression in the English which renders some passages rather heavy in style and intractable as to their intended sense.

At the end of the book Professor Chittick has provided some thirty pages of very illuminating notes to the text, a comprehensive bibliography, a detailed index of his sources, mostly of course an index of his quotations from and references to the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah*, an index of quotations from the Qur'an, an index of Hadiths and Sayings, and finally a very useful index of names and terms. The book has been well produced and the material as pleasingly and comfortably presented as is possible with such a huge corpus of text. The publishers are to be congratulated on this achievement.

R.W.J. Austin